

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

8 December 1950

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 342

SUBJECT: The Northern Boundaries of Korea.

Summary.

The present report summarizes information on international agreements or arrangements concerning the boundaries of Korea, and on the location of the boundary in the Yalu and Tumen rivers and between the headwaters of these rivers in the vicinity of Ch'ang-pai Shan (Paektu-san). The Yalu River has marked the definite northwestern boundary of Korea since about 1875. Before that date, a neutral zone to the north of the river separated China and Korea. In the north and northeast, the boundary was defined as extending along the Tumen River according to an agreement of 1909 between China and Japan. Although no international agreement is known to exist defining the boundary between Korea and the USSR, the lower Tumen River has traditionally been regarded as the boundary. Uncertainty regarding the course of the boundary in the Ch'ang-pai Shan area arises from the fact that the region is sparsely inhabited and was only partially explored until recent times. Claims of China and Korea overlap in this area.

Apparently there have been no detailed demarcations of the boundaries in the rivers and no formal allocation of river islands to one country or the other. Agreements are on record dividing jurisdiction over one bridge across the Yalu and one across the Tumen at the middle of each of the spans. Japanese authorities considered that in the rivers the boundary extended along the principal channel. In the lower Yalu several large islands were under Japanese jurisdiction. Neither the Japanese nor the Koreans seem to have claimed jurisdiction over the entire width of the rivers.

Yalu River Section.

The northwestern frontier of Korea has been located in the vicinity of the Yalu River for many centuries. The dominion of the state of Koryo of Koryu (circa 918-1231 A.D.), from which Korea derives its name, extended up to the eastern bank of the lower Yalu but did not include the islands in the estuary of the river.¹ In describing Korea, the military history of the Ch'ing Dynasty (Manchu Dynasty, 1644-1911) stated that: "It was originally Chinese territory, and separated from Sheng-Ching [province of Manchuria] by the Yalu river."² During most of the Manchu Dynasty, however, China and Korea agreed that a neutral zone should be maintained to the northwest of the Yalu. This area was about 50 miles wide and extended from the river to the Barrier of States, or Willow Palisade, which marked the northeastern limit of predominantly Chinese settlement in Manchuria.

The Yalu was considered the boundary for customs purposes during the Manchu period. On the Korean side, the border was patrolled and guard houses were erected along the line of the Yalu. Uiju, on the Korean side of the river, was the gateway for movement to and from China.

No settlement was supposed to be allowed in the neutral zone, but gradually Chinese farmers and lawless elements from both countries moved in. In the eighteenth century, Manchu officials made attempts to police the zone but, in deference to the wishes of the Korean Government, refrained from establishing permanent control. Later, joint Chinese-Korean policing expeditions were sent

1. South Manchurian Railway Company, Chosen Rokishi Chiri (in Japanese), Vol. 2, pp. 29-77.
2. Quoted in William W. Rockwell, "Korea in its Relations with China," Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 13, 1889, p. 6.

Note: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force.

into the neutral zone.¹ Finally, in the period 1873-1875, the Manchu government, with the consent of Korea, extended its permanent jurisdiction over the area. The frontier zone became a frontier line along the Yalu River. Chinese forces were sent in and Chinese gunboats patrolled the river. When this action was contemplated, the Chinese proposed to build a wall and a ditch along the Korean side of the neutral zone, but this seems never to have been done.²

No information is available regarding the jurisdiction over the islands of the lower Yalu after the neutral zone was abolished. In the 1870's, Chinese gunboats patrolled the river and broke up pirate nests on islands near the mouth. It is possible that the Chinese exercised some authority over the islands at that time and that Korean control began at a later date, but this cannot be proved on the basis of current information.

No information is available to indicate that the Chinese and Korean governments, or later the Chinese and Japanese governments, ever agreed upon an exact demarcation of the boundary line in the river or the allocation of river islands to one country or the other. One Japanese writer³ asserts that in 1909, at the time of the Chinese-Japanese agreement regarding the Chiontao region, the boundary was fixed on the Manchurian side of the Yalu and Tumen rivers, thus leaving the entire watercourses of both rivers to Korea. In reality, the agreement of 1909 makes no reference to the Yalu River, and the provision regarding the Tumen River does not state specifically in what part of the river the boundary falls. On 2 November 1911, China and Japan entered into a convention providing for a direct railway connection across the Yalu between Antung, Manchuria, and Simiju, Korea. Article 2 of this convention reads as follows:

For the purpose of through train service over the two railways, the centre of the Yalu iron bridge shall be regarded as the dividing line between the two countries, the western portion being the Chinese boundary and the eastern portion the Japanese.⁴

Article 5 of the convention provided that customs inspection by both Chinese and Japanese officials would take place at the Antung station on the Chinese side of the river.

There is no single, universally accepted principle or practice in international law for determining the location of boundary lines in rivers. In general, such boundaries have been defined as following one or a combination of four courses: (1) the median line, or line dividing the surface of the water in half down the length of the stream; (2) the thalweg, or line of the deepest continuous channel; (3) a river bank; or (4) a series of arbitrary geometrical lines. The most common practices are to apply courses (1) and (2). Because of the frequent changes in river channels and river banks and the fluctuations in water levels, courses (1), (2), and (3) in any given stream are difficult to determine without considerable study on the spot. Although there appears to be no international agreement describing the boundary in the Yalu in detail, the Japanese, judging from their maps, adopted the policy of placing the limits of their administration along the principal channel. The line chosen may follow the median line of the principal channel or it may follow the thalweg, or it may be only a rough approximation of both of those courses.

For determining the de facto limits of Korean administration, reliance may be placed on the Japanese maps of Korea at the scale of 1:50,000.⁵ The earlier sheets of this series do not show an international boundary in the Yalu,

1. Shamon, McCune, "Physical Basis for Korean Boundaries," Far Eastern Quarterly, May 1946, pp. 278-274.
2. Rookhill, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 13, 1889, pp. 19-20.
3. William Elliot Griffis, Korea, the Hermit Nation, 3rd edition, New York, 1888, p. 182.
4. Kozo Iwata, Kokkyo Siji Chiri (in Japanese), Tokyo, 1938, pp. 176-178, and 181-182.
5. John V. A. MacMurray, Treaties and Agreements With and Concerning China, 1894-1919, New York, 1921, Vol. 1, p. 914.
6. Korea, 1:50,000, Land Survey Bureau, Government-General of Chosen (in Japanese). Most of the sheets were published in the 1920's. The series Korea, 1:250,000 (A.M.S. 1552) and Manchuria, 1:250,000 (A.M.S. 1542), Army Map Service (1950) is also reliable for boundary representation.

but the border can be determined fairly accurately by reference to the outer limits of Korean counties and townships, the distribution of Korean (as opposed to Chinese) place names, and the location of the principal channel of the river. On these map sheets, Korean civil division boundaries are shown as extending to the southeastern bank of the Yalu, or out to the middle of the stream, but in no case do they extend entirely across to the Manchurian bank.

The lower Yalu is a braided stream with a broad estuary and a fairly wide flood plain. The stream is divided into several channels by numerous islands. Many of these islands disappear and reappear with changes in the water level or the silt load of the stream. The flood season is in late spring and early summer owing to the melting of the snow; tides also effect the level of the lower river.¹ The principal channel is generally on the northwest or Manchurian side and Korean jurisdiction extends to most of the islands between this channel and the main southeastern bank.

At the mouth of the Yalu, the main channel lies close to marshy ground on the Manchurian side. The larger islands under Korean control include: (1) Sin-do, at the mouth of the river; (2) Hwang ch'o-P'yong², opposite the Korean town of Yongbong; (3) Yuch'o-do, immediately south of Simuiju; and (4) Wihwa-do, upstream from Simuiju. Where the Yalu flows between Antung and Simuiju, it is confined to a single channel, and apparently the mid-channel line here corresponds fairly closely with the center points on the two bridge structures.

The main channel of the Yalu continues nearer Manchuria for some distance above Wihwa-do, but a few small islands appear to be Chinese. One of these is just west of the Korean island village of Soho-dong, approximately six miles above Simuiju, and another is north of the Korean island village of Yongun-dong, which lies about three miles northeast of Uiju.

From a point about ten miles above Uiju to its source, the Yalu has cut a deep, gorge-like valley. The river is confined mainly to one channel and islands are few. The main channel forms the de facto boundary. The course of the boundary across the Sup'ung (Suiho) Dam and in the Su'pung Reservoir presents another problem. Judging from the precedent of the Antung railway bridge, the center of the dam is apparently considered the dividing line between the two countries, but this is not definitely known to be the case. In the reservoir, the boundary would appear to extend along the old channel of the Yalu as it was before the reservoir was constructed.

During the days of the Japanese puppet regime of Manchukuo, the question of the location of the boundary in relation to the Sup'ung project was probably not of great importance. The dam and generating plant were built to serve both Korea and Manchuria, and there are said to have been agreements between Manchukuoan and Japanese authorities providing that each country was half owner and should receive half of the power from the plant.³

Tumen River Section.

1. China-Korea Boundary.

The Tumen (Korean, Tuman; Chinese, T'umen) River separates northeastern Korea from Manchuria; and, for a distance of about 11 miles near its mouth, the river separates Korea from the USSR. The Tumen River, which flows into the Sea of Japan near Posiet Bay, was regarded, at least by the Chinese, as forming the northeastern boundary of Korea for a considerable period before the twentieth century. The Koreans, however, claimed the Chientao region north of the river in Manchuria. This claim was based on (1) Korean settlement in the region; and (2) the presence of another stream of the same phonetic name (T'u-men) that has

1. McCune, Far Eastern Quarterly, May 1946, p. 275.
2. The Chinese Ministry of Defense, Bureau of Surveys, map series China, 1:1,000,000 (compiled and drafted 1943) agrees with Japanese maps in allotting Sin-do to Korea, but shows Hwang-ch'o-P'yong as Chinese. This series is ambiguous as to the ownership of other lower Yalu islands.
3. American Embassy, Nanking, T-769, 9 April 1947.

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its headwaters near the headwaters of the Tumen but flows northward into the Sungari-Amur drainage system. The Koreans asserted that the smaller, northern stream formed part of the true boundary.

The Chientao question was finally settled in 1909, after Japan had taken over control of Korea. Chinese sovereignty over Chientao was confirmed in an agreement signed by the Chinese and Japanese Governments on 4 September 1909, and the southern or larger Tumen was declared to be the boundary. Article one of the agreement provided that:

The Governments of Japan and China declare that the River Tumen is recognized as forming the boundary between China and Korea, and that in the region of the source of that river the boundary line shall start from the boundary monument and thence follow the stream Shik'yishwei.¹

So far as known, there has been no subsequent understanding between the two countries on the demarcation of the boundary in the river and the allocation of river islands.

On 9 June 1915, representatives of China and Japan signed an agreement regarding the construction of a bridge over the Tumen. The cost was to be shared equally by the two countries. The location of this bridge was not stated in the agreement, but it may have been for one of the railway lines connecting the Korean port of Ch'ongjin with points in Manchuria. Article one of the agreement stated that:

The Tumen River Bridge shall be owned jointly by the Governments of China and Japan, each of which shall control and maintain the respective halves of the span divided by the boundary fixed at the mid-river point of the bridge.²

From the wording of this article, the two powers seem to have considered the boundary as lying in mid-channel.

In mid-1960, a railway was reportedly nearing completion for connecting the Korean town of Hongui-dong, north of Unggi and about 6 kilometers from the Tumen, with Vladivostok, USSR. Originally the section of the road from Hongui-dong to the Tumen and the bridge over the river were to have been constructed by the puppet Communist government of North Korea, and the section from the Tumen to Vladivostok by the USSR. Later it was reported that the North Korean Government would build only the track to the river and that the Soviet Government would build the bridge. Arrangements regarding jurisdiction over the bridge have not been learned.

2. The Korea-USSR Boundary.

There appears to be no international agreement relating specifically to the 11-mile stretch of the Korean-Soviet frontier formed by the lower Tumen River. As in the case of the upper Tumen, which forms the boundary between China and Korea, the lower portion of the river has been regarded as the traditional boundary. The treaty between China and Russia signed at Peking on 14 November 1860 defining the eastern boundary of China with Russian possessions provided that the boundary should end at the Tumen River "20 Chinese versts (11)" above the mouth of the river, but the treaty did not refer to the Tumen as a boundary.³

A Soviet source states that the legal position of the Korea-USSR boundary is very unclear.⁴ Commissioners appointed by China and Russia in 1861 to demarcate and map the boundary defined by the Treaty of 1860 ended their work at a boundary marker lettered "T" on the left (east) bank of the Tumen a considerable distance from the sea. Nor was the Korean-Russian segment of the boundary checked by the

1. MacMurray, Treaties Concerning China, Vol. 1, p. 796.

2. Collection of the Treaties Related to China, compiled by the Gaiko Jiho Sha (in Japanese), Tokyo, 1930, p. 859.

3. Godfrey E. P. Hertslet, Treaties, &c. Between Great Britain and China: and Between China and Foreign Powers, Vol. 1, London, 1908, p. 482.

4. International Boundaries of the USSR, Issue II, Boundaries: With Manchuria, Japan and U.S.A., (in Russian), compiled by F.P. Kolchanovskiy, Moscow, n.d.

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mixed commission that verified the position of markers on the Chinese-Russian boundary in 1886, because "it seems that the Tsar's Government considered it correct not to establish an exact borderline with a semi-independent Kingdom of Korea." The commission of 1886 also proposed that an agreement should be made providing for navigation of the lower Tumen by Chinese vessels. A Korean-Russian agreement of 20 August 1888 provided for freedom of navigation on the Tumen to coasting vessels of each of the countries.¹ In 1911, after the Japanese occupation of Korea, the Russian Government called the attention of Japan to the necessity for a delimitation of the boundary along the Tumen. In 1914, Japan presented a plan for definition of the boundary along the channel of the river, but nothing was done up to the time of the Russian Revolution.

The lower Tumen flows through a marshy area to reach the sea. The river is relatively wide for a distance of 50 or 60 miles from the mouth. There are a number of small islands and sand bars in the lower portion of the river. The Korea 1:50,000 series (1942 revisions) shows the boundary as extending generally along the principal channel. Near the Korean village of TOOOK-tong, south of Hanyung, the Tumen has abandoned a former meander and cut a shorter channel. The Japanese compilers of the 1:50,000 series represented the boundary as remaining in the old dry channel, thus placing within Korea a parcel of land on the Manchurian side of the Tumen. Above Hanyung the river narrows and its valley becomes more deeply entrenched.

Ch'ang-pai Shan Area.

The sparsely inhabited area between the headwaters of the Yalu and the Tumen, on the southeastern slopes of the Ch'ang-pai Shan (Korean: Paektu-San) mountain group, has been subject to dispute or discussion since the mid-nineteenth century. Ch'ang-pai Shan is a group of extinct volcanoes that rises from a high plateau and encloses a lake. In 1713, an official representing the Manchu Government, accompanied by several Korean representatives, inspected the headwaters area and erected a boundary monument. The inscription on the monument states:

...we inscribe this stone on the watershed dividing the Yalu River to the west and the T'u-men River to the east, marking the boundary for Manchuria and Korea.²

Later the dispute arose regarding the identity of the T'u-men River mentioned in the inscription. Koreans claimed that the stream referred to was the one flowing northward toward the Sungari and bounding the Chientao region on the west. The Chinese asserted that the southern Tumen was the one intended. The dispute thus became a phase of the dispute over the entire Chientao region. A joint Chinese-Korean party explored the headwaters area in 1885, and Koreans and Japanese examined the area at various later dates. These expeditions discovered that the boundary stone stood about two and one-half miles south of the summit of Ch'ang-pai Shan, between a gorge which contained the source of the Yalu and another believed to be the source of the Tumen. A line of stone and earthen mounds extended in a northeasterly direction to a stream said to be the T'u-men, ending at an earthen gate on the banks of this stream.³ After 1887, the question of the T'u-men tended to become academic, since the Chinese and Koreans, and later the Chinese and Japanese, having decided to place the boundary along the Tumen, concentrated on the problem of finding the source of that stream.⁴

1. British and Foreign State Papers, 1887-1888, Vol. 79 (London), pp. 684-641.
2. Nada Yuji, "The Boundary Marker on the Paektu San," Chosen Gyobi Hanshu no Kenkyu (in Japanese), Vol. 1, 1914, p. 450.
3. Hence the name T'u-men (Dirt Gate) River.
4. Kanbara Tadashi, "The Chientao Boundary Issue," Scientific Reports by the Research Department, Oriental Association, (in Japanese), Tokyo, 1909, p. 275.

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The agreement of 1909 (quoted on p. 4) provided that near Ch'ang-pai Shan the boundary should extend from the boundary monument to the stream Shihyishwei (Chinese: Shih-i-shui; Korean: Sogul Su), thence along that stream to the Tumen. The generalized wording of the agreement and the relatively unexplored state of the area with which it deals have led to confusion regarding (1) the alignment of the boundary from the marker to the head of Shihyishwei, and (2) the identity of the stream Shihyishwei. A large number of channels extend outward from the slopes of Ch'ang-pai Shan toward the Tumen. These are dry for most of the year, carrying water only during the period of the spring thaw. Identification of the headwaters of the Tumen among this maze of channels is difficult.

Work by the Japanese in the area has done much to clarify the topographic relationships. Japanese maps show the location of the boundary monument, the head of the Yalu, and the head of the Shihyishwei with apparent accuracy, but there is some confusion as to where the Shihyishwei ends and the Tumen begins. The maps, however, indicate a boundary eastward from Ch'ang-pai Shan (line A on the accompanying map, CIA 11044) which differs in important details from the line called for in the 1909 agreement. The Manchuria, 1:100,000 series,¹ for instance, shows the location of the boundary monument somewhat to the southeast of Ch'ang-pai Shan. This map indicates the boundary in its east-west alignment as beginning not at the boundary monument but at a high point on Ch'ang-pai Shan some distance to the west of the monument. The Shihyishwei and its source are indicated on the map, but the boundary is located not along this stream but along the Ko-to-sui, another small branch of the Tumen to the north of the Shihyishwei. The basis for these variations from the agreement are not known. The possibility that the location of the boundary marker on the map is wrong, or that the marker itself has been moved from its original position cannot be ruled out.

Chinese cartography adds further confusion regarding boundary lines in this area. Chinese maps of recent decades generally show the border going up a tributary of the Yalu and from there over a mountain pass to a tributary of the Tumen, thus completely by-passing Ch'ang-pai Shan (lines B or C on CIA 11044). Although Chinese maps are not consistent in indicating the alignment of this boundary, they are rather consistent in avoiding the extension of the boundary to Ch'ang-pai Shan.² The basis for this representation is not known. It may arise from a lack of first-hand knowledge of the area on the part of Chinese cartographers. On the other hand, the Chinese are reported to claim the Ch'ang-pai Shan area because it was the birthplace of the founder of the Manchu Dynasty.³ The Koreans have a similar sentimental attachment to the area, however, because it was the birthplace of the founder of the Ri Dynasty, the last royal rulers of the country.

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1. Manchuria, 1:100,000, Japanese General Staff, based on aerial surveys, 1948. Sheet WA135.
 2. For a more complete discussion of the cartography of this area see CIA M-7, Korea: Evaluation of Maps, November 1948, pp. 49-53.
 3. McCune, Far Eastern Quarterly, May 1946, p. 279.

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